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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains one teacher's experiences with teaching poetry to children, offering suggestions and insights about organizing the subject matter, preparing a conducive physical environment, and practicing with various poetic forms. Sections of the booklet discuss the characteristics and behaviors of writing room teachers, the organization of the space set aside for writing and reading poetry, the reasons for using poetry in child language development, types of poetry (including diamantes, cinquains, and haiku), and the use of group writing in poetry instruction. The final section of the booklet lists resources for teaching poetry. (RL)

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*from
fluorescent sandpaper
to
shiny orange poems*

*the writing room
durham child
development center*

gloria s. bush

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C5226129

i can't think of anything
not green and purple boats
not sparkly orange chairs
i can think of nothing
not fluorescent sandpaper
not shiny orange poems

ross h. (12)
april, 1974

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back in
like
a willow
Please come
follow me
are wilted
are dead
A cold hard thing
Sometimes wet
Is never hot
Plip, Plop, into the swamp
makes it
slips off
You are cold
Haiku and
Sea, Sky, BLU
light
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"Thoughts that breathe and words that burn....."

--Thomas Gray

Poetry is an experience lived or envisioned by the poet, and translated through language. That translated experience lies incomplete, unfulfilled, until it has been re-lived, re-tasted by a reader. As a painter lives a single experience and chooses to bring it to us through pigments, the writer of poetry savors an experience and would have us join him through language, choosing words as the vehicle that permits us to transcend his skin, to feel what he felt, to see what he saw. The words specially chosen and arranged by the poet do more than please our ears. The poet's language gives us the newest, fullest, most intimate sense of inhaling the original experience, of living in it and of feeling deeply.

All children have had contact with physical things, have remembered-experiences, experiences wished for and already imagined, have ideas about the physical world and

have some sense of what their place is in the natural order of things. Believing this, it becomes an enjoyable task of finding out, with the children, what all of these experiences, thoughts and feelings mean to them personally. It becomes a mutually playful task to help children interpret their experiences into original language, to say it as no one has ever done before.

I want the children to allow poetry to be a part of their good times, to recognize that poetry can do what prose cannot. I want them to return as naturally to poetry as they do to other pleasurable activities. The emphasis in the writing room has been on encouraging children to write, to actively play with words and phrases, using them in ways that story-writing doesn't permit. I want, finally, for the children to join me eagerly in a long search, a lifetime search, to find out what poetry really is.

Along the way, we are learning that poetry writing is difficult, that the difficulty in developing a poetic

sense is truly part of this never-having-to-end game. The German critic Baumgarten spoke of the central impulse towards poetry as the Spieltrieb, the play impulse.

"Every game ever invented by mankind is a way of making this look hard for the fun of it. The great fun, of course, is in making the hard look easy."¹

I have neither expected nor led the children to believe that they have written great literary treasures. I have expected and received creations, born from within the children, sometimes from so deeply within that no reproduction or sharing is allowed. I have refocused my eyes along with the young writers and have, with them, achieved a certain honesty in observing and reacting. Reciprically, the children and I have increased our awareness of the beauty of language in interpreting life as we feel it to be at any given moment.

¹ John Ciardi, An Introduction to Literature, Barrow, Hefner, et al; Houghton Mifflin Co.: The Riverside Press, Boston, 1959.

On Cold Snow
And Jack
You hate rain it
shoes go crunch
wets me soggy
Silence is broken
Nothing happening.
California breeze
Pitch
Night is be the
Hong Kong pre
fists are
everywhere.
I scream until I am
flying south
when winter still
flutters
When
Raining
in
Pigeons
always hungry
soaring in air
pecking, fighting,
stupid
Fancy
make me in
my
fine
dreams
blowing through
autumn breeze
I hear bells ringing!

"How shall I tell the dancer from the dance?"

--William Butler Yeats



"How shall I tell the dancer from the dance?"

--Yeats

SM (age 11) is a frequenter of the writing room during her free time. She watches, listens, apes, writes, comments, hovers, learns.

At my elbow as I re-print a child's latest poem, SM asks to read it aloud for me. We are alone in the room waiting for a group of 3-4 year olds to appear. "That's beautiful", she comments, and I add how much I like the word images in "flashing Hong-Kong nights". SM is quiet for a while, says she loves my printing, then catches my completely by surprise. "You didn't do this last year. Did you learn how to do poetry over the summer so you could show us this year?" We laugh simultaneously and SM says "No. You couldn't have done that. You must have already known!" She goes behind the screen to think about a new poem, leaving me to think about her question and answer.

If SM had really wanted an answer from me, could

I have agreed that I already knew? Or, would I have admitted that the writing room was to have been a place of creative work in all of the language arts and that my own love of poetry led me to begin in that area? Finding the children thirsty for the world of poets and poetry, we continued to pursue that avenue, growing more entranced as the weeks passed in the marvelous things that happen to one's insides when a nebulous idea tickles at the mind, grows in meaning and feeling, then exists outside of one's self as a poem. That the idea could take the shape of a dance, a painting, a song, a sculpture, but that we could choose to let it be a poem, tantalizes the children and after some writing sessions causes the rather matter-of-fact explanation that "this might not turn out to be a poem, but put it in my folder anyway". The joy of creation has flowed parallel to the happy anticipation of which poet (grown-up or child) we would listen to next.

I would have had to admit to SM that I wasn't at all sure that I already knew "how to do poetry", but that

I was sure that I loved poetry and her, sure that I understood some things about her growth and development as a learner. Somehow the loves of poetry and children, some skills and understandings ought to combine in any writing room.

I have been a lifetime scribbler: I both work (teach school children) and play (doodle) with a pencil nearby. Writing is natural to me, used first as a means of communicating with myself in childhood. Filling private notebooks was a way of amusing and of keeping in touch with myself. Having no brothers or sisters, I learned quickly that adults tend to look askance at kids who talk aloud to themselves. Though writing was an important self-directed activity, books came first.

I remember no poetry or poems from early school years, though there must have been some. I discovered poetry, first from rhymes chanted while I "cooked" dinner with my mother after school; then, as I began to devour the nearest public library there were poems in books! For

many years I simply read them, sometimes writing verses of my own to be shared with no one. By the time I had reached high school and was questioning everything that existed, I wanted to know the hows and whos of poetry. Subsequently, my free choice reading included books on versification, biographies of poets, anthologies of poems. There was never enough time for them all and there was always one more book that I wanted to own or borrow. That problem still exists. It is a problem I wish upon the children.

A writing room for children in a school needs an adult, not necessarily a teacher, who wants to share poetry, rather than teach it to children. I hope no school will ever embark upon the impossible project of teaching poetry appreciation. Given the chance to create some poetry of their own, to hear the efforts of their friends, to listen to good recordings of poetry and to hear an adult read aloud selections chosen from personal preferences, the children will appreciate poetry.

In choosing poems to read aloud to children, I have made no attempt to follow the "rules". Poems that appeal to me and particularly those which I think will interest the specific children who are to hear them are the ones I read; it does not matter whether a poem has been written expressly for children or not. Vocabulary and content totally beyond the children's comprehension is avoided, but I have been wary of underestimating the children's comprehension. When in doubt, I have tried it.

I have shunned the thousands of children's poems which I think are too sweetly cute, those which are obviously written down to children and those having little poetic merit. Poems which fall into those categories are in books in the writing room, accessible to children who might choose to read and enjoy them. I don't select them as ones to read aloud to the children; if I don't like the poem, I shall read it badly, an injustice to the children and to the poet.

My tastes in poetry and my general disagreement

with which poems are suitable for certain age groups have widened the range of poets the children might have normally met in an elementary school setting. The seven to fifteen year olds have met and relished portions of the works of Shakespeare's "Tempest", T. S. Eliot, the contemporary West African poet Léopold Sedar Senghór, along with a list of others whose works are not specifically directed to children.

The writing room person should trust his own preferences in selecting poems for children to hear, should know what he likes and be openly honest in letting the children know that a specific selection was chosen for just those reasons. In an atmosphere in which the adult-in-residence is a contributor rather than an expert, children accept the selected readings as an effort on the adult's part to share. Their own creative writings are shared with me and their friends; my readings to them are approached in that vein, never as something I think they need to hear, study, evaluate or discuss.

If responses occur following a reading, they are accepted; if not, they are not elicited, though I do tell children why I like certain poems. Poems are for hearing and the experiences embodied in them are for personally internalizing. Often, the emotional impact of a poem prevents an oral response. Sometimes, my choice is in direct conflict with the emerging tastes of a child, and negative responses are accepted without comment. The children may request to hear certain poems read over and over again, or may flatly ask me to not repeat a reading after the second hearing. Most of the selections I've read have been duplicated for the personal collections of children who want to keep them. These private collections are simple construction paper booklets in which children keep copies of poems they like whether written by a classmate or an adult poet. Titles of these collections range from "Boss Poems by People I Like" to a sedate, "My Poem Book, Volume III".

During this year of guiding the children into

writing their own poetry, I have been asked three persistent and strange questions: "Do you change the children's words?", "Why is most of the work on display in your handwriting and not the children's?", and "Why do you correct the children's spellings if these are their poems?"

I think I am extremely sensitive to and protective of the children's choice of words. Editing, by the writer, is an ongoing, necessary process which no child is permitted to skip. Editing by the writer's peers and an adult sometimes happens, with permission, and may or may not be ultimately accepted by the writer. The children have gradually come to feel the fun in playing with words, in saying the same thing in an unusual, creative way. They comfortably, willingly, spend as much time as possible in searching for the most precise, word-saving, poetic way of expressing their thoughts.

I never supply a "better" word for a child's poem. I do ask if there is anything in the poem that might want changing after a child has heard it read aloud

several times. Re-thinking and changing words is encouraged. The best time to do the re-thinking is certainly after the poem is "cold". Warm from the thinking-writing process, the poem, to the child, usually sounds just perfect. But, time has different values to children than it does to adults; post-poning a re-reading to the end of a session is, surely, a long enough time to wait before taking another critical look or for enjoying another happy listening. "Print it" is usually the verdict on the day a poem has been created. Often, however, the writer will return in a few days, see the poem in print, read it aloud again and decide to change some lines or words. Out comes the original, the typed copy gets the notation "first version", and the exhibited copy gets re-printed and re-posted. The children are their own best editors and will only occasionally ask other children for just the right word to help with an idea.

An underlying purpose of the writing room is to stretch imaginations and vocabularies, to meet head-on

the profusion of beauty that our language holds. Sometimes I'll ask the writer for permission to use a poem to stimulate a word exercise, playing "how many ways could this have been said?" A poem to its author, is never really a closed entity, even if it has been published in a book. We have talked of revisions and know what they involve. Yet, there is a time when the writer knows that he is satisfied, emptied of an idea, and wishes to let the writing stand as it is. It is that almost imperceptible line that I try to watch for in working and editing with the children, recognizing its presence in myself and knowing from experience that to push when that point has been reached is useless.

That most of the written work in the room is on display in my handwriting and not the children's must need an explanation since it has been questioned so often. No, I am not ashamed of the children's handwriting! I am very concerned that the children understand that poems are for reading, preferably aloud. Having had the

children undertake the de-energizing job of creating a poem, editing it, copying it into a personal notebook, I still want more. I want that effort shared and enjoyed by other people. A child's poem has to be written large enough to be easily read by others who visit the room. And why, indeed, should the writer have to be burdened with poster-size editions of his work? Authors don't have to go to the printer and set up their own type! Besides removing the chore of another, larger re-printing, the children have understood that if I am willing to take the time to carefully, attractively print their poems for display, then I must care very much about their work. They, in turn, have cared, too.

All of the children's poems are kept in the original, with misspellings, cross-outs and erasures very evident. I find tremendous pleasure in seeing the growth in spelling skills over a period of time; yet, whether asked to or not, I casually, without comment, correct any spelling errors before the writer has a chance to

compound them by copying them over into notebooks. I believe that children want to spell correctly and would, if they could. It's that simple. I haven't yet met a child whose attitude was "so what?" towards misspellings in his writings. I don't teach spelling lessons or ask the children to be overly conscious about their spelling when writing. The advice of a seven year old boy to a new-comer in the writing room sums it up:

"Just go ahead and write. If you get some of the letters mixed up, she'll fix it for you so you can copy it right in your poem book".

I have had to rely on my own writing habits and on the preconditions necessary for me to write in setting up and conducting the room. I would encourage anyone else to follow that general rule of thumb. If the writing space takes into account one's own needs as well as those of the children, and reflects some of one's own personality, all of the people involved in the room seem to become

relaxed enough for creativity to flourish.

It is difficult, nearly impossible, for me to write creatively on-the-spot, if I am ordered to do so. I may be expected, invited, urged, but not told. As soon as that happens, coherent words freeze. I can only think, "I must do this; but I can't". I need to want to write something and must have the time and space to move around in while thinking about it (which may take minutes, hours, or weeks). The children are always given the opportunity to write, but never allowed to feel any disappointment when they cannot. It is not unusual for children to tell me after an hour's session that "I don't feel any poem today". I've shared with them what is for me the always-new phenomenon of wanting to write, of feeling ready to write, and then of not being able to produce a single phrase on paper.

The actual mechanics involved in putting thoughts to paper takes the least amount of time and mental energy, and, for me, requires very little physical accessories,

though I do have favorite pens and a wide selection of papers. Once the ideas have jelled, have been mentally accepted and rejected, and are complete within me, the writing is only a matter of finding a firm surface and the writing tools. Sometimes, it is easier to get it out at the typewriter; sometimes the ideas are fast, tumbling over each other, and there is no time to write them legibly; then, only a kind of scribbled shorthand will contain them and a translation copy becomes necessary. When that happens, one could just as easily tell it all to a willing transcriber rather than go through the process of writing. So, I make no distinction with the children between work that is dictated and work that comes to me already written down.

During the mechanical writing process, I don't need absolute quiet or solitude, and have found that the children don't either. I do require both those things during the thinking stage, while I'm still fitting together ideas and feelings with the words. The writing room has

been deliberately set up to physically accomodate those who may be in both stages of creating.

In establishing such a writing area for children, a pre-requisite seems to be to find out what is necessary personally when trying to write, and then to incorporate that atmosphere and those physical conditions as much as possible for yourself and the children who will share the space.

In sum, a writing room contains an adult, maybe a teacher, who brings to the area the conviction that children can communicate creatively through writing. The adult believes that there are hundreds of untapped poems dormant in the children. He carefully, sensitively helps to free those poems and expressions.

The adult need not be a writer, by profession or avocation, but has, on his own, attempted to do everything he expects the children to do. Understanding from first-hand experience the process involved in creative writing - the ease and the difficulty, the frustration and

the pleasure - he is eager to share those learnings with the children, and is better equipped to recognize and appreciate the painstaking efforts of others.

He approaches poetry neither as a frill nor as a chore, but as one of the many life-long, rewarding activities begun in the school's curriculum. Hopefully, the writing room person will read poetry extensively for enjoyment, since that is what he expects the children to do, and will through his own enthusiasm and skill transmit that enjoyment to the children.

"To everyman his treehouse....."

--James A. Emanuel

"To everyman his treehouse....."

--James A. Emanuel

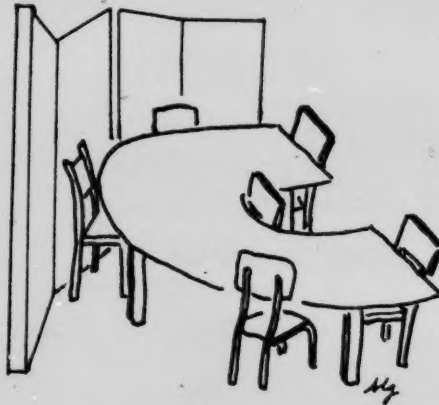


The writing room or writing area provides an oasis for its workers, a change of pace spot, kept solely for writing-thinking-producing, and never used as an expedient place to conduct other activities. The room remains constant enough in fixtures to provide a comfortable security: try to resist the urge to change the arrangement of furniture once it proves to be well-organized and functional. Little, by way of furnishings, is needed; a few tables and chairs, depending upon the largest number of children to be served at one time (15-18 in our writing room).

Enough space is needed to accomodate a single child or small group of children who seek seclusion. Some writers do need an area that hides them from the main view, and allows them to feel alone with their thoughts:

- . Book-case partitions
- . Tri-wall fences
- . Folding screens

could be arranged in front of a few writing desks or a table. Check this screened off area for sufficient lighting.



Writers need thinking time and places in which to think. Space permitting, the writing area could include:

- . clear floor space (ours was used for pacing, sprawling, staring at ...)
- . fat floor pillows with washable covers
- . an easy chair for lounging while thinking, or
- . a rocker, not necessarily child-sized



Ideas are triggered by almost anything that catches the eye...

- . colorful wall displays
(too few rather than too many)
- . a plant arrangement
- . an interesting piece of sculpture
- . an unusual doll (who lives in the space and may be handled and talked to as well as looked at)

Revisiting old ideas often leads to new ones. Wall, table, or rack space is provided for easy accessibility to

- . poems the children have already written
- . the favorite poems of the week/day/month
(by adults or children)
- . poetry collections kept by the writers

If it's one of those empty just-can't-write days,

the writing room permits us to "fill up" again by:

- . reading self-selected poems from a changing collection of paper-backs (ours was called the "Have a Poem Rack")



- . re-reading selections from the teacher's collection of poetry books.....slips of paper kept in as markers for quick signals to browsers...

These are kept separately from the children's books only so that they can always be accessible to the teacher, too! (Expect some reading aloud noises in whatever space these are kept.)

- . editing our own newest poem
- . asking another writer for permission to read his poems
- . selecting, from collections, pictures that we might want to write poems about someday, maybe even today...
- . choosing and playing a record from the collection of poetry, folk tales, commentary, etc.

In a small writing area, or if part of the library is used as the writing room, the use of a listening center is advisable. In our open-classroom atmosphere with the large space available the children had access to a portable, battery-operated record player, without



earphones, that was taken under tables, in corners, and wherever seemed most isolated and comfortable to the listeners.

. illustrating poems

(The emphasis in the writing room was on writing. I encouraged the children to use the arts and craft room in the school so that they might begin to sense the continuity in different forms of artistic expression. However, limited art media was available, especially for the 3-5 year olds.)

- . using the cassette tape recorder, battery operated, for enjoying the sounds of our spoken language, for hearing and sharing poems

The writer's tools may be as important to him as

his ideas:

- . A primer typewriter (with margins pre-set for the youngest children) and

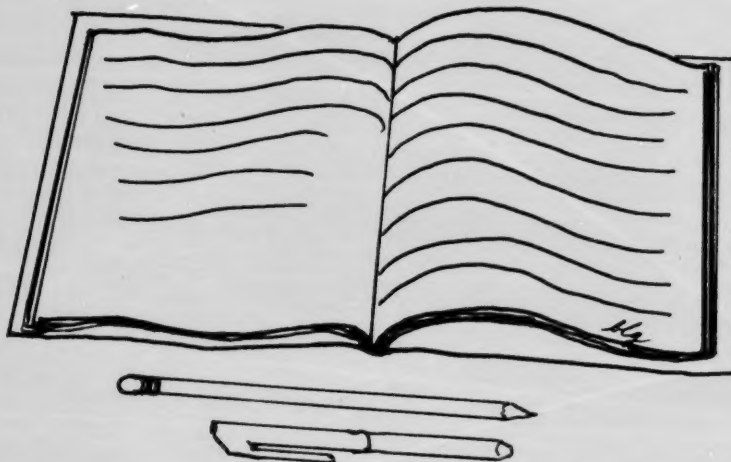
Lots of newsprint (8½ x 11), kept in the table drawer under the typewriter...A daily sign-up sheet may be necessary to control the flow of traffic.

At the typing area, special treats were bits of hot pink, goldenrod, robin's egg blue rexograph paper, scavenged from overruns at the staff's duplicating center.

Pencils, erasers, and a few sheets of carbon paper are kept near the typewriter.

- . Pencils in paper cups or cigar boxes in at least two locations in the area.
(When an idea strikes, it's frustrating to have to search!)
- . Fine line felt tip pens provide an extra touch. Some children used these exclusively for copying purposes.
- . Composition books to be used as personal notebooks, softbacked, the thinner the better.

Ours were teacher prepared by covering fronts and backs with prints, gift wrap, catalog covers, unusual advertisements. Edges and spines were re-enforced with contrasting or color-coordinated cloth tapes. Blank gummed labels were stuck on for author's names. The notebooks were kept in the writing room, stored in vinyl wall pockets (oil cloth will do), and on the folding screens which had elastic bands nailed above wooden strips.



The supply center for teacher and children could be

a bookcase. It holds:

- . Quantities of assorted sizes and colors of construction paper
 - for mounting
 - for printing
 - for making poetry collection booklets
- . Scissors, staplers, rulers, erasers, crayons, thick felt tips, paste and rubber cement, tape
- . Reserved space for unusual pieces of boards, cards, papers

Sometimes, the grain and texture of a piece of paper will spark an idea. The children may enjoy selecting different kinds of mounting papers for their displayed poems. Even the act of choosing harmonizing background sheets has attuned some eyes to new sources of beauty.

- . Writing papers, lined and unlined

These thinking-sheets (original copies) are more important than they seem. Vary the papers by offering

- sheets cut on the diagonal
- sheets cut in half lengthwise instead of across the width

-pastel colored strips left over from mounting posted poems...

Fun to work out a new poem on a 5 x 11 strip of lavender construction paper!

-try ovals, crescents, diamonds, the unprinted sides of left-over gift wrap, a variety of sheets from dime store tablets, whatever catches your eye and fancy.

File box or cabinet or desk drawer: Each writer needs a file folder in which to store his dated originals.

In the writing room, even a "messed up" sheet is important, not to be thrown away. Children date and file all working copies. In the early days, there was much dismayed head-shaking at a teacher who actually encouraged the keeping of papers with scribbles and scratch-outs on them. There is now much examining of old originals, searching for unused ideas that were jotted down, and reminiscings over words thought of but finally rejected.

To protect the children's privacy (mainly from adults), I kept these folders filed in the deepest drawer of the teacher's desk. Children agreed to and honored the privacy restrictions, but had access to their own folders at any time.

"When I'm grown up and can have what I please -

I think I shall always insist upon these....."

--Christopher Morley



The almost incredible magic of poetry is its ability to make one thing clearly known to us through the images of another.

Children, with eyes unjaded, do this with the ease and understanding of a working poet. It is the imagery of poetry, perhaps more than its rhyme or rhythm, that captures children's interests and hones their perceptions of the world. Painting pictures with words is as natural to children as handclapping, especially when they have had successful and satisfying opportunities to do so.

But, my emphasis on building word images in the writing room has had a deeper purpose than to provide the children with a pleasing mental tool for poetry-writing. Adults (whose eyes are often jaded, smog-filled, and weary) look at a striking sunset and laconically think "How lovely", knowing that those words don't begin to approach our most fleeting reactions.

What if, automatically, through years of easy practice, we could, at will, tap the imagery of poets

whose experiences we've shared?

What if, glimpsing or basking in that same sunset,
we could easily "hear" Margaret Danner's

"It was as if Gauguin
had upset a huge paint pot
of his incomparable tangerine....."?

And, what if our own word images play upon that
inner ear and finally free us to see and feel beyond "how
lovely"?

Image making, begun and coaxed and nurtured in
childhood, the time when it comes most easily and with
least inhibition, could become a satisfying lifetime
habit. It is the tool of a poet. It is his sleight-of-
word genius with this skill to which we want the children
to become attuned.

In the writing room we are on the alert for
increasing our power in creating these word images, no
matter what it is we're trying to say poetically. Our

ears are ever on the alert for sensing imagery magic in the writings of poets we gather together to hear. Once we've begun to write ourselves we begin to more keenly appreciate the efforts of others who have done the same thing throughout the ages. This dual search, within ourselves and others, has dictated the organizational theme for the writing room sessions:

- . The group-writing session
- . The invitation to write
- . The sharing table

The Group Writing Session

Almost all of the writing sessions begin with a time in which all of us are together to contribute to a group poem. It is during this time that I deliberately orchestrate: asking a flurry of questions, probing for more ideas, stretching the children for a variety of words

and phrases until we (often by actual vote) settle on the "best" word image that has been jotted down on the "thinking" sheet.

These group poem writings begin with an idea, and sometimes with an idea and a specific poetic form:

The idea may be as vague, as open-ended as "What shall we write about today?"
"What's on your mind?"

or as explicit as

"I like this picture. It has so many greens in it. Let's see what it makes us feel."

It is in these developmental group-writing sessions that I feel free to temporarily reject a word or phrasing (pending final consensus by the group), and to fish for more accurate, imaginative language, trying out each new image on the children's ears. Since I am a member of this working group, I, too, may offer opinions - "I don't really like the sound of that line". My opinions are just

that, and carry no more weight than that of any other writer at the table. I enjoy the times when these opinions are met with, "I think we should keep it just the way we started out". Occasionally, some children will ask in return to my probing, "How do you see it?", "What would you say?" My word image contributions are tossed onto the thinking page, to be scratched out or altered or accepted as the poem and the group demands. Whenever I have been a contributor to a group poem, the children are firmly insistent that I sign my name, too, as a co-author.

B.J.L.: Why do you ask all these questions when we're working together on one poem?

G.S.B.: So you'll know what kinds of things to ask yourself if you ever get stuck when you're writing alone.

Using a picture to build word images:

From a collection of glossy colored prints, I had mounted a closeup of a profusion of magnified raindrops on a spider's web and on blades of grass. It was already

on the table as the children came into the room.

This group of 8-10 year olds are just beginning to observe the commonplace in fresh, keen ways. Their poems have begun to reflect the use of the simile and the metaphor. No concentrated effort has been used to identify these literary devices, other than to play games in which the children try to find verbal images to match a word or an idea.

Heidi wrote: "My oven is a glass house; it is an incubator."

Sarah: "The football is a bullet shot by a human gun."

Kelli: "Softer than anything in this world, millions and hundreds of tiny feathers fall from the cloud pillows."

I invited the children to take time to search the picture while thinking of ways to make images for it so that anyone who might read our words could picture and feel what we did.

A clean sheet of paper was brought by a child to be used as the thinking sheet (some children refer to it as the idea page).

the conversation

Child: the first thing I think we should put is "bubbles of water"

G: What are the bubbles doing?

G: Maybe it would help if you were to close your eyes and see the bubbles of water all by yourself. Now, are they breaking? Is that the exact word you want to tell what is happening to them? (By now this kind of question is accepted as an honest request for opinion, not as a leading question for the children to change the words. Often the response is "Yes, that's the word we mean".)

C: Try "popping" and see how it sounds

the idea page

Bubbles of water

Breaking on spider webs

C: But there's more than one!
Put "Popping on spider webs"

Popping on spider
webs

G: I like that! But, I
can't feel those spider webs.
Let me know what the bubbles
of water feel when they touch
the webs.

C: Slippery/lacy/silky (The
line is read with each of those
words; the group agrees on
silky.)

(A line is drawn through
the first three lines
and we begin again)

C: Write, "And leaves..." (But
instead, I write a clue to the
children)

And _____ leaves

The blank line is a clue that I
think a descriptive word is
needed, or that something is
missing. Without further
prompting a child offers

C: "And pointed leaves....."

And pointed leaves

G: What could these pointed
leaves be?

C: They're like a crowd of
little people.

C: You trying to say there's a bunch of pointed head little people there in the rain?

like a group
of little people

C: No, they're pointed head little weasels - see how the leaves bend, like a weasel looking at something?

G: What could they be stretching to see on a morning like this?

C: They're watching a football game and those raindrops are the players.

G: What shall I write? (I re-read everything on the idea page)

C: Cross out that part about the people and write, "Like weasels watching a football game". (But, before I can write it, they've changed their minds.)

C: Put, "like weasels watching a rainy football game"

like weasels watching
a rainy football game

The first version reads:

Bubbles of water popping
On silky spider webs
And pointed leaves
Like weasels
Watching a rainy football game

G: If you need to, close your eyes while you try to "see" what we just wrote: I re-read the lines.

G: What do you think?

C: It sounds like it's not finished, like we're going to say something that has happened but we don't.

(There are a few nods of agreement with this assessment.) There are no suggestions for how to make it better. (I supply some help.)

G: I think I can hear what it is that bothers you about the lines. Do you want the reader of your poem to feel that these things are still happening somewhere?

Or do you want them to feel that
you might have happened by, looked
down, and this is what you saw?
(I could think of no other way to
delete those participles that
seemed to have bothered some of
the children.)

C: Let's make it so that we're
walking by.

G: Just as you walk by and look
down, Bubbles of water _____

The children supply the word
they have previously used, but
now in the present tense:
pop. I repeat the pattern with,

Just as you walk by, you notice
that pointed leaves like weasels
_____; the children
supply the present tense, watch

Re-reading the lines, the children
voice approval for the change and
watch as I re-print a "good copy"
for special hanging in the room.
They choose a felt tip pen for
their signatures at the bottom
of the big sheet.

Bubbles of water pop
On silky spider webs
And pointed leaves
Like weasels
Watch a rainy
football game.

What shall we write about? What's on your mind today?

with

Pier, Cookie, Karla, and Alfred (6-7 year olds)

P.: Well, I'll tell you. Animals.

G.B.: What kinds? (not sure if we want to get specific or not)

P.: All kinds. I love them.

G.B.: Does anyone have a favorite? Maybe we ought to choose a favorite animals to think about today.

A.: Dogs, snakes. (I begin to list on chart paper)

K.: Birds, elephants.

C.: Tigers, kittens.

G.B.: I like gazelles, antelope, impalas, koala bears! It's so hard for me to pick just one favorite, too. What shall we do?

C.: I'll see which one we like best. (Takes the paper.)
I know everybody doesn't want snakes and dogs because I don't. Cross them out. (She does)

P.: I have birds, so kittens aren't my favorite.
Cross that out, o. k.?

C.: Alfred, if you could have a tiger or an elephant, which would you choose?

A.: Elephant, elephant. Let's do elephants.

G.B.: (To the group) Shall we?

K.: Sure, why not?

G.B.: (Taking the chart paper from Cookie who relinquishes it with a look that says 'told you I'd get this together for you'.) I have our thinking sheet here. Let's see what happens when we think elephant. Close your eyes and feel the heat! Sun's coming at you hard. There's a skinny little tree; lean up against it. No leaves on it. The earth under your feet is dry, smells like dust. An elephant is coming. You know it. Open your eyes now if you want to. Where are you?

P.: In the jungle!

G.B.: Is anybody afraid? (Lots of NO's) Here he comes now. Walk up closer to him and let me see what you see. I'll want to know what it's like if you reach out and touch him. I'll write while you talk to me:

Elephant

Gigantic !

Enormous !

Ears are floppy
like Pier's hair

Heavy rough feet
go pounding...

He is a thumper
and a bumper
and a stomper

Going through the jungle.

Cookie, Karla,
Alfred, Pier

(6-7 yr. olds)

standing in the meadow
shunking

being killed shunk, eaten
away and
being gnawed at

slowly
dying → slow
death

dying slowly, eaten away
by life bugs
by ~~life~~

beautiful bug
gnawing
nuisance

~~swaying~~ willow tree
oak tree
chewing away

gnawed by nature's pests
until termites attack
standing in the meadow

Lovely 2

~~standing oak tree~~ 4

swaying willow tree

gnawed ~~not~~ by nature's pests 6

dying slowly, eaten away: 8

~~by life~~ 2

Tony
Lavette
Nino

Harvin
David C.
Matt T.

Harvin's group

(Termite)

THE WILLOW

Lovely

Swaying willow tree

Gnawed ~~not~~ by nature's pests

Dying slowly, eaten away

By life.

Tony
Harvin
Lavette
David C.
Matt T.
Lia

The Invitation to Write

Dan's group came in high and jittery today, at odds with each other, restless, and seeming not particularly eager to work with each other on creating a group poem. This group is always eager to write their own poems, and take great delight in "publishing day" sessions when typed copies of classmates writings are distributed and re-read.

Their collective mood was one of "Let's get on with it" as they met at the table. I left them to each other for a few minutes to get our copy of Lillian Moore's book, "I Feel the Same Way".* These children had recently taken a trip as part of their science curriculum to Birgantine Beach in New Jersey. Among the poems read aloud to them was, "Until I Saw the Sea". One child asked to have the poem read again and there was some ensuing talk about seeing the ocean in winter, being on a beach without tourists, what it must be like to live alone on a beach...

* see appendix

Until I Saw the Sea

Until I saw the sea
I did not know
that wind
could wrinkle water so.

I never knew
that sun
could splinter a whole sea of blue.
Nor
did I know before,
a sea breathes in and out
upon a shore.

The group was clearly ready to be freed of each other, and the invitation to write was greeted with relief. The invitation is a loose one.

Children who have an idea (many come to the room knowing what they want to write about) take whatever paper I've put out and find a comfortable place to write. Some want aloneness behind the portable screens at the half-circle table. Others just move away from the group to an isolated table. Some prefer to stay near a friend or me for instant help with a word. Children who have no ready

ideas now relaxedly tell each other, "Don't panic if you think you can't write a poem today". These children usually wait for me to come and talk with them, spending time re-reading their own poems or occupying themselves productively in the room. Sometimes they take paper and a pencil and just sit thinking until I come to talk.

Today, Dan was one of the children who took paper and went alone to the big wooden table under the window. He had accepted a whole sheet of $8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 paper, but returned with his poem on a three inch strip. I asked what had happened to the rest of the paper (the children know that nothing written on gets thrown away and that I enjoy seeing all the thoughts that get rejected along the way). Dan said that he thought it was going to be a long poem, but it wasn't. He had put the unused paper back into the drawer. He said his poem was about "being on Brigantine Beach".

How it feels to be free. by Dan Waskow

How good it feels to be free.
Free as a bird, Free as a wild horse
Free as the wimnnnnnnnd

I immediately read poems aloud to the writer, first to make sure I have the sense of what was written, then to have the writer truly hear his words and to decide upon immediate changes, if any.

Dan corrected my rendition of his poem. I had read it so that the word 'wind' in the last line faded away as a howling wind might do if it roared past me on a shoreline. Dan wanted it read as if a wild horse were roaming down a beach and neighing at the same time. We each read it to two other children who happened to be

nearby. Comments were, "That's really good, Dan." "I like the times you repeated the word 'free', it's like a horse is really galloping."

I suggested a different line arrangement because the word 'free' was so important in the poem. We went to the typewriter together and he watched as I rearranged the second line of the poem:

How It Feels To Be Free

How good it feels to be free,
Free as a bird,
Free as a wild horse,
Free as the winnnnnnd.

Dan accepted that arrangement and I pointed out the punctuation I had changed and added. He took the typed copy to use as a model for copying into his poem book. I kept his original for the file. Dan returned the typed copy to me for duplicating and for pasting in the big writing room collection of poems.

Cars

Cars are noisy;
they go down
the street backfiring
like firecrackers

- John S.

This is John's second poem, but his first attempt to organize lines. I reprinted the poem on large chart paper just as John arranged it, adding punctuation. John asked for none and received no help with the poem. He was one of the children who knew what he wanted to think about today, and moved independently away to produce this.

(Sophia's Nov. 5, 1973 poem)

Sophia came into the room with her group asking if she could write her poem right away and not join the group at the table for a group-poem. She said she had been thinking about this poem and knew what she wanted to say. I offered her a whole sheet of lined paper; she

tore it in half and left the group.

She wrote for about fifteen minutes, and came back stating that she did not like what she had written and asked that I please not read it aloud to her at all.

November 5, 1973

in November it might Snow When it Snows
~~in the~~ if it is snows we have
hot chocolate for breakfast
then we go out to play in the Snow.

I got her permission to rearrange some of her lines at the typewriter, and she came with me to watch.

I told Sophia that I was typing it just the way I would read it aloud, if I could read it aloud. That seemed to interest her and she read aloud over my shoulder as I typed.

In November it might snow
When it snows
If it is snowy*
We have hot chocolate for breakfast
Then,
We go out to play
In the snow.

*Sophia said snowy as she read over my shoulder although she had written snows. I made the spelling correction as I typed.

Sophia agreed to let me read it aloud to her, smiling I think because it looked like a "real poem". At the sharing table she permitted it to be read aloud, accepting constructive comments from the group, but maintaining her position that the poem wasn't a "good" one. We honored Sophia's request to not duplicate it for sharing.

FILLING A PRESCRIPTION

the diamante

the haiku, senryu

the tanka

the cinquain



Mia Wied

Milk Wagon dancing skirts -

Friend in a Windy Day.
 Dances of the
 62
 Suburban



Prescriptive poetry writing, in which a special form is followed, is one crutch upon which the teacher and children may lean immediately while getting to know each other. Each new form is presented during a group writing session, followed immediately by a group effort to create an original poem using that form.

These formula type poems provide a means for immediate success while the children are oiling up their image making gears. The invitation to write during these developmental sessions includes the suggestion that the children try, on their own, the form of poetry we have just used together. It also includes the freedom to use any other form or none. The children, in the early days, may also be more comfortable teaming with a companion after the invitation to write has been offered.

The ultimate goal is a spontaneous creation in which the content dictates its own pattern.

THE DIAMANTE

When viewed as a word game, the diamante is a comfortable way for some children to take the plunge into putting words together in a particular way, of starting at one place mentally and trying with words to reach the opposite point.

The tight structure involved in building a diamante is satisfying to children who come to writing room for the first time with the beliefs that they cannot write creatively and have nothing to say, if they could. The diamante is a stretching exercise, best used with children who are old enough to have used the terms for various parts of speech. They find the diamante's diamond shape fun to develop in seven lines.

As with each new type of prescriptive poem, the diamante was offered to the children as a new way of saying something that we have felt strongly. Expect the children to write a diamante with you immediately, the first day that they come to the writing area. Do not give them already produced examples of what the exercise should contain.

I have avoided the practice of asking children to write a particular new kind of poem during the same session in which I read or show samples. After expending the creative effort to produce a poem, the writer is a more perceptive and sympathetically appreciative listener to what others have written. Withholding examples until we have done it ourselves also helps children to avoid patterning, frees them to concentrate on their own ideas and tends to promote authentically original writings.

To develop the diamante with the children, begin with two sheets of large chart paper, side by side, or a chalkboard divided by a vertical line. There are seven steps to be followed. If you need to

conserve time, the seven steps may be already printed on the left hand side, if not, write them as the poem is developed with the children. The children's responses to each of the seven directions are printed on the right.

If you are an adult and have never tried to write a diamante, why not try covering the right hand side of this sheet and working through the directions yourself?

How To Write A Diamante

Line 1

Choose two contrasting ideas.

The first word you choose will be the title. It will also be the first line of the poem. The opposite word you choose will be the last line of the poem.

Example

Line 1 - Country

Line 7 - City

Example

Line 2

Think of two adjectives
to describe the title.

Country
Beautiful, peaceful

Line 3

Think of three participles
(-ing, -ed verbs) that are
related to the title.

Country
Beautiful, peaceful
Calming, resting, flowering

Line 4

The change to the opposite
idea begins on this line.
Think of four words that
are nouns, but concentrate
on moving towards the
last word in the poem.

Country
Beautiful, peaceful
Calming, resting, flowering
Yards, roads, dust, grit

Line 5

Think of three more
participles. These will
describe the nouns on line 4.

Country
Beautiful, peaceful
Calming, resting, flowering
Yards, roads, dust, grit
Driving.....walking.....working

Example

Line 6

Think of two adjectives that
will describe the last line.
(The last line has already
been written.)

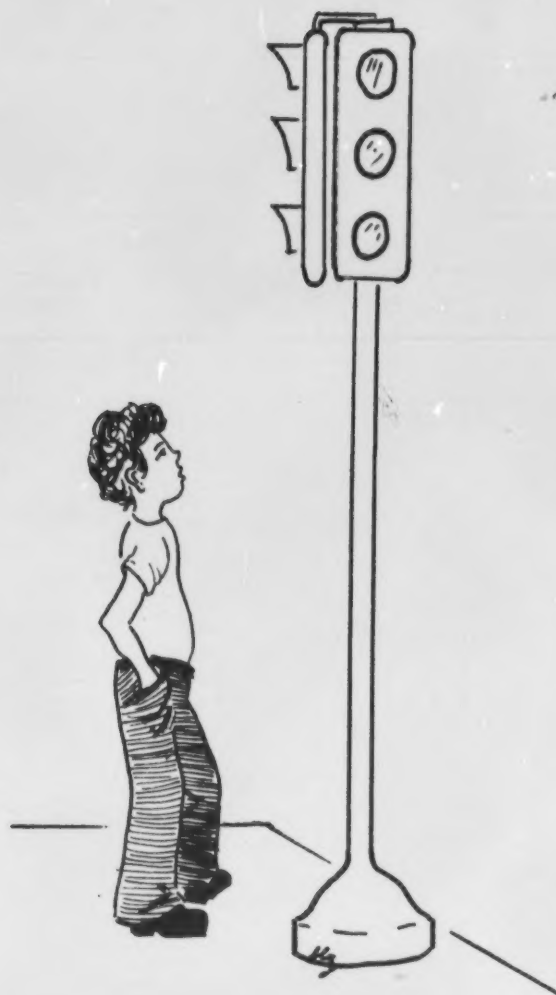
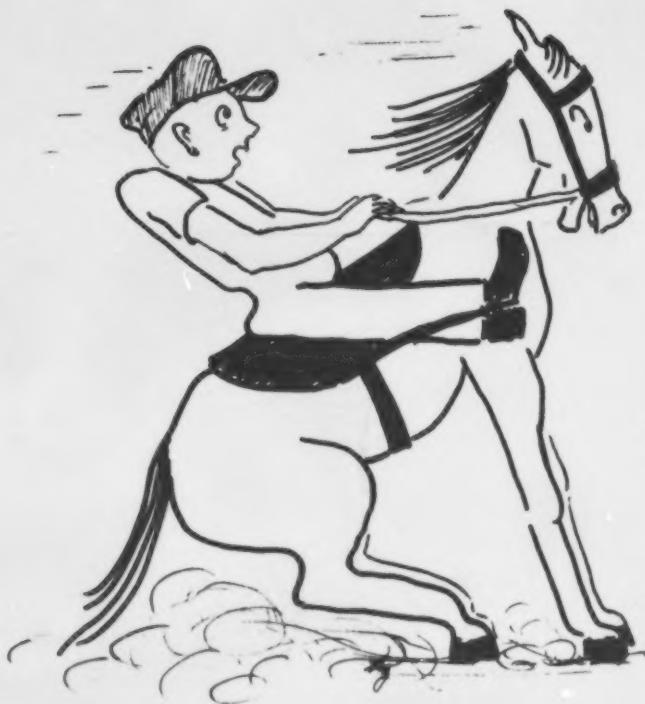
Country
Beautiful, peaceful
Calming, resting, flower
Yards, roads, dust, grit
Driving.....walking.....working
Busy, ugly
City

Line 7

was written with line one
at the beginning of the poem.

TEDDY'S DIAMANTE (age 10)

Stop
Crowded, busy
Halting, ceasing, waiting
Cop, light, brakes, sirens
Holding, waiting, moving
Green, speedy
Go



MATT'S DIAMANTE (age 8)

Giddyup
Go.....fast
Trotting, galloping, stampeding
Horses, mustangs, stallions, mares
Jumping, rearing, whoa-ing
Steady-boy !
Halt.

Big

Gigantic, huge

Enlarging, expanding, inflating

Hippos, whales, zebras, snails

Little, small

Microscopic

Sandra

Kelli

Sarah

Heather

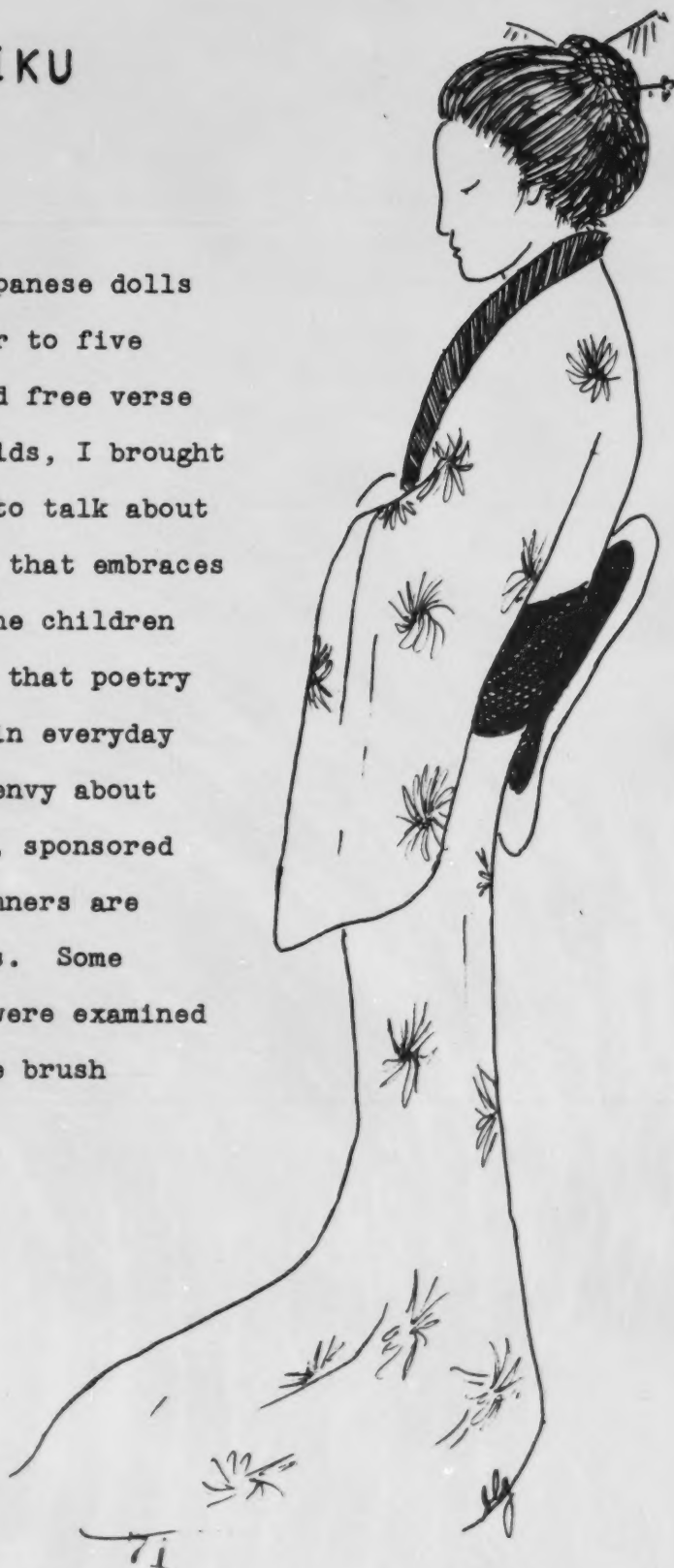
Matthew

John



HAIKU

There are two authentic Japanese dolls in the writing room. After four to five sessions of trying diamantes and free verse with the eight to twelve year olds, I brought the dolls to the sharing table to talk about shibui (the Japanese philosophy that embraces the sense of the beautiful). The children were full of wonder at the fact that poetry is a real and important factor in everyday life in Japan. We talked with envy about annual Japanese poetry contests, sponsored by the emperor, in which the winners are honored at formal tea ceremonies. Some pictures of Japanese art forms were examined and we noted the delicacy of the brush strokes and the use of soft grays and greens, slashes of burnt orange.



I read aloud half-dozen or so haiku verses without naming the verse form, asking only that the children try to "see what the poet saw" when he wrote. After several poems, I asked that the children listen for some things that were alike about all of the poems.

The verses selected were from:

Japanese Haiku, Peter Pauper Press

New York, 1955

and

Cricket Songs, Harry Behn, Harcourt,

Brace, 1964

Some of the similarities noted by the children were:

- . these poems were all very short
- . they were about just one thing, not a lot of different things
- . none of the poems were about people
(they could have been)

I talked briefly about the many kinds of oriental poetry, explaining that the kind we were hearing is called Haiku (high-koo). It is usually about lovely, fragile

subjects. I read two more verses so that we could listen for some reference to nature, and to see if the last line said something surprising, or made the listener feel that the thought was not quite finished. We ended the session by hearing again the verses the children had liked best. I promised to explain the reason that the haiku verses were all so short during the next session.

Not one of the children in any of the groups exploring the haiku remembered the name; most referred to it as the Japanese poetry. (Some did refer to it as the Kung-Fu, a popular tv program.) I had some different pictures, simple nature scenes by a Japanese artist, and while the children examined them I talked about haiku poetry as a part of Japanese art, not just a tricky way of writing verses. I asked one of the children to say a sentence, the first one that popped into his head. The rest of us tried to count the number of syllables in the sentence he spoke. We repeated this about four times and then I read three haiku verses. The children concluded that these verses have seventeen syllables in all. I marked

off a pattern on chart paper to show how the seventeen
syllables were usually arranged:

_____ 5
_____ 7
_____ 5

then asked the children to think of a suitable topic about
which we could compose a haiku verse.

2

Aly said he HATES delicate things! He stormed away from the group to be alone behind the screen with writing paper and pencils. He was back in less than ten minutes with this:

Fat belly dancer's
in the small cafe
kissing
the army soldiers

Aly was surprised that he had actually written another kind of Japanese verse form which uses the same syllibism as the haiku. I wrote the word "Senryu" for him (sen-roo), and quickly pointed out the difference.

Senryu verses may or may not have a reference to nature and may be written about a broader range of topics, not necessarily delicate ones.

MATT'S HAIKU

Matthew Pappajohn wanted to write a haiku, but had no idea with which to start. I gave him some pictures of landscapes, animals, seasons. He quickly discarded them and began, as other children often do, to pace the room. At one window sill he stopped at an arrangement of dried silver dollars, some white twigs and red berries. He squeezed one of the berries and warned a friend who walked by that people shouldn't eat them. (They were not harmful.) He spent another few minutes just looking out of the window. Some of the berries with their dried yellow leaves had fallen onto the window sill and Matt scooped these up and brought them to the table where I was sitting.

He began to write, carefully counting out the syllables. I had asked the children, who stayed with me, to write out their ideas in prose and then to take out unnecessary words, and finally to work on the syllable count. Matt stopped after the first line and asked for a common procedure in the writing room: "You write, I'll think". He gave me his pencil, but said nothing for what seemed to be a long time. I realized that he was trying to think in syllables instead of

in ideas and encouraged him to just tell me what it was he wanted to say about the holly bushes. "Well, when it snows on them, especially, they look all dressed up, like they're going to a fancy party with little yellow capes on the berries." I wrote exactly that on a separate sheet of paper, reading it back to him to be sure it was correct. I told him that haiku wasn't easy; that it was sometimes hard to squeeze a beautiful image into just seventeen syllables. I asked him to try, but I continued to wait with his pencil ready in my hand. Matt played around with the words, counting out syllables on his fingers, then told me to write

"at a fancy party-".

He said he knew that phrase did not have seven syllables, but that was what he wanted to say. I added the phrase to his paper and asked if he thought the poem was finished. He wanted to put in a part about the capes and dictated the last line:

"Red berries and yellow capes".

The syllable count was all askew; Matt knew it and was very pleased with his imagery (so was I).

I showed him a book of haiku verses translated from Japanese (Japanese on the left side, English translation

on the facing page). We counted syllables in a few of them and Matt was reassured that three lines with 5-7-5 syllables was not at all an inviolate rule.

He was eager to share this with some friends in the room and came back requesting that berries be changed to hats: John Schall thought it made better sense.

Matt's writing {
dictated {
HOLYS
Three holly bushes
At a fancy party -
Red berries and yellow capes.
hats

change suggested
by classmate, (John Schall)
accepted
by Matt with
"yes! that's
better!"

Three holly bushes

At a fancy party -

Red hats and yellow capes

After a few weeks of hearing and writing haiku verses, I asked the children to select some of their own for a display near the plant center (one landing of the stairway is filled with growing things). Others worked on compiling some verses for re-printing in the haiku book. The favorite of most of the children's was Sylvia's Milkweed haiku:

Milk weed

Milk weeds' dancing skirts—

Fairies in a wind wedding:

~~morning glory DAWNS.~~

Dawn of the morning.

By Sylvia M. 12-7

Milkweeds' dancing skirts --
Fairies in a wind wedding:
Dawn of the morning.

The catalyst for this verse was a jar of dried milkweed pods that had burst into the inflated plastic bag which covered them. On more than one morning Sylvia had fingered the plastic bag wondering aloud what it would be like to shake them out to fly across the room.

Terri Cayruth

Oak Trees Just Stand there

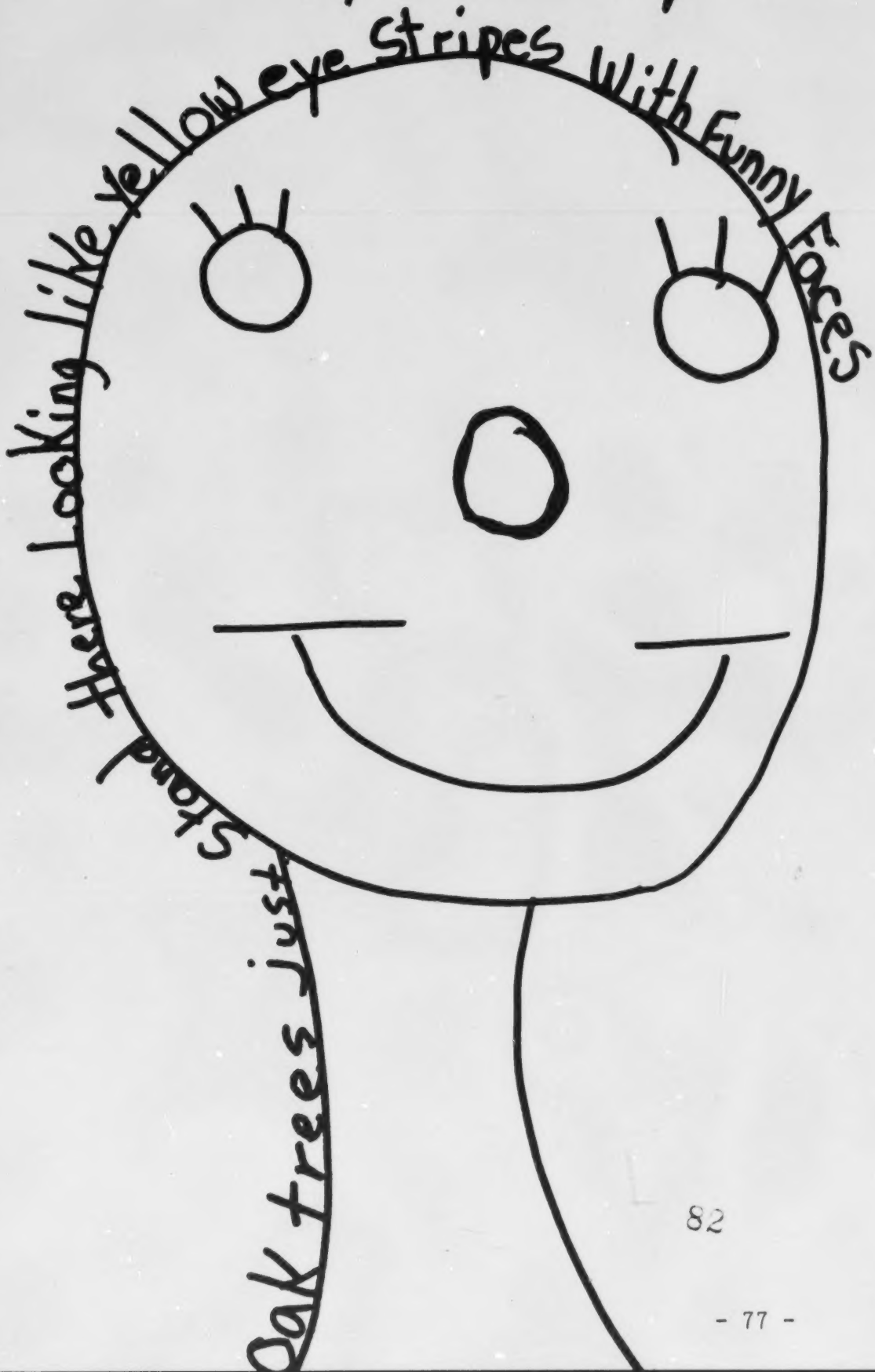
#1

looking like yellow eye Stripes

With Funny Faces

#2 Trees Just Stand there looking
like blue eye Stripes

by Terri Cayruth



THE TANKA

Children who enjoy writing and hearing haiku, senryu, might like to explore another form of Japanese poetry, the tanka (tonk - a). It's subject matter is the same as the haiku. It's form is a haiku with two more lines added. The two additional lines have seven syllables each.

_____ 5	
_____ 7	Haiku
_____ 5	
_____ 7	these two
_____ 7	extra lines
	are called the
	ageku (a-gee'-koo)

One haiku and an ageku form the 31 syllable tanka.

Once very popular in Japan and thought of as a "woman's" poem, while the haiku "belonged" to men, the tanka has fallen out of common use now. The old sexist ideas have been dropped and the haiku has become the nation's favorite verse form.

Lonely white seashells
Never getting together
Bathed clean by the waves
Are you hungry for my hands?
Are you listening for friendship?

(Marcia's Friday group)



The Cinquain

The cinquain (SIN-QUAIN) is a verse form developed by the poet, Adelaide Crapsey. Its name comes from the french word, cinq, which means five. The children and I had considerable fun in counting to five in french, in seeing the words written, in discovering that cinquains are five line verses, and in deducting the meaning of the word quatrain.

As a verse form, the cinquain is used to create atmospheres of lightness, airiness, softness, and so its subject matter is restricted. The cinquain uses nature references to highlight the poet's feelings. These verses are always unrhymed, without jerkiness, and have no regular meter. In addition to a restricted content, cinquains have a prescribed syllable count for each of the five lines:

The pattern begins with a two syllable line. Two more syllables are added to each line until an eight syllable line is formed. The poem is concluded with a line of two syllables.

_____ 2
 _____ 4
 _____ 6
 _____ 8
 _____ 2

This verse form is best explored after children have had experiences with other syllable based patterns like the oriental haiku and tanka. Less compressed than the haiku, the cinquain permits children to easily expand a central idea.

In writing the cinquain it is almost imperative that the beginning poet verbalize his images on paper or orally, so that his concentration and efforts are not divided between having something to say and in manipulating syllables and lines to get it said in a prescribed pattern.

The next few examples of children's cinquains were written independently during the year. They are representative of the ease with which the children captured the essence of the cinquain. Showing a lightness of tone, indicating an emotional state through some reference to nature, and using the prescribed syllable count is a tall order for children's creative writing efforts.

Next Day Excitement



Dozing,

Going to bed

Trying to get to sleep

Tossing and turning all night long:

Dopey!

H
Lisa
r
r
i
s



Rocky,
Frozen giant
High peaks reaching skyward
Standing, watching over the earth;
Silent.

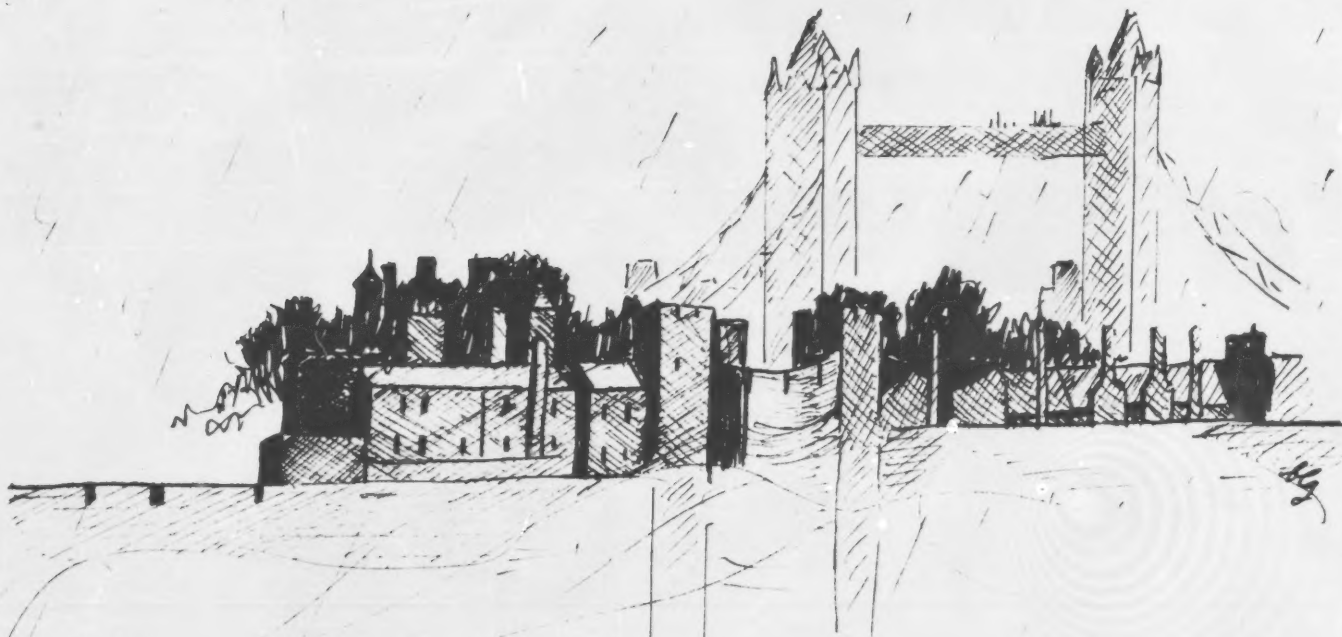
Nina, Oona, Kira, Susan

My Rock



Glassy
Humming colors
As rough as a sidewalk,
Lying with others at the beach,
Spotted.

David Castleberry



London:

Damp, misty fog

Slinking all over town

Making mountains invisible -

Stuffy.

Liz Feinberg



Japan,

The Orient!

Lovely, extravagant women

Living their own life style...

Red fans.

Sarah Bittenwieser





Breezes

Whispering thoughts

About lonely feelings

Uttering its last words, dying

Softly.

- Susan Bockenhauer

I knew that at some time during the year I wanted the children to experience the cinquain in its subtle beauty of form and expression. It is too complex a structure to introduce immediately to beginning writers. During the early weeks as we were writing and enjoying couplets and tercets, I found a description of a simplified cinquain form invented by an anonymous teacher. It is related to the poetically accepted cinquain only in that it requires five lines of words, but proved to be helpful to all of the children as a first step towards translating images into words.

This simple form is not concerned with a syllable count, and has no restrictive range of content; any subject and treatment are suitable. Only the number of words on each of the five lines is important:

The first line has 1 word.

The second line has 2 words.

The third line has 3 words.

The fourth line has 4 words.

The fifth line has 1 word.

Although the form is simple and the content unrestricted, the necessity of squeezing an image into as few precise words as possible becomes a hard-thinking, creative task

for beginning writers. The results provide flashing, teasing looks at the author's perceptions.

This form of cinquain (1-2-3-4-1 words) should not be confused with the syllable based verse form called the lanterne. Lanternes also have five lines; the syllable pattern is 1-2-3-4-1.

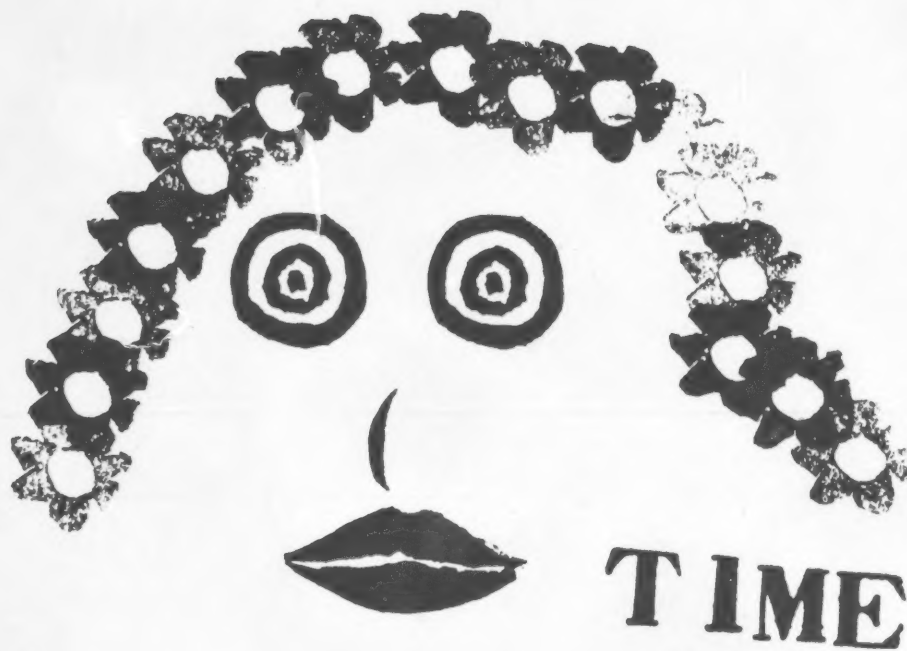
Robert's Lanterne:

Pools
Of foam
Lapping me -
The ocean says
"hi".

Robert Lark (10)

Most children from age six can write and enjoy this simplified cinquain form. The verses included in this small collection happen to be from a group of older children (10-12) who were all members of the same classroom. The illustrations were made by rubber stamp erasers.*

* see appendix



Clocks

Ticking-tocking,

Slowly moving hands,

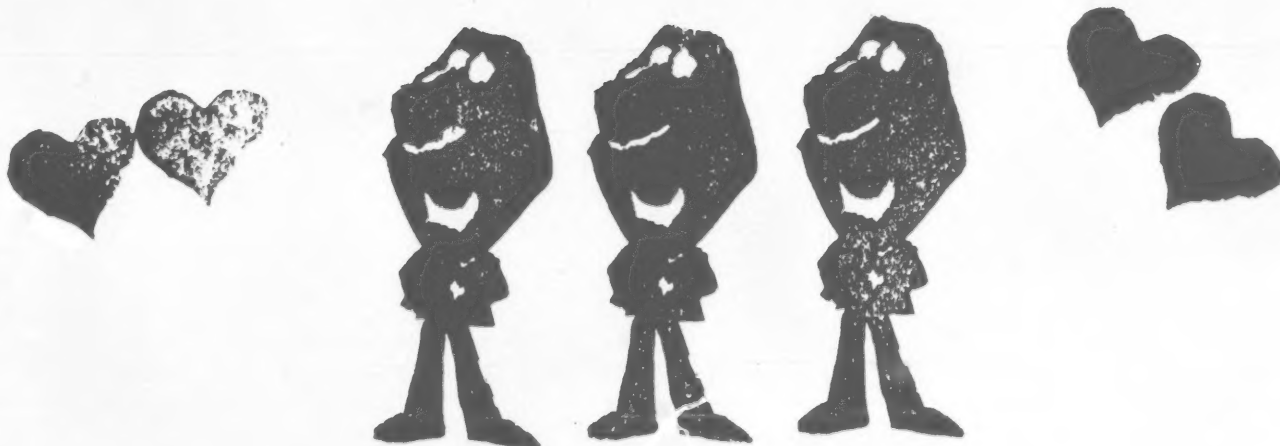
People winding every hour,

Time ?

H
Lisa
r
i
s

Dancing,
Rock-party,
Doin' the Bump,
Tony and Ziggy Truckin',
Jammin'.

David Fambro



DF



Eating -

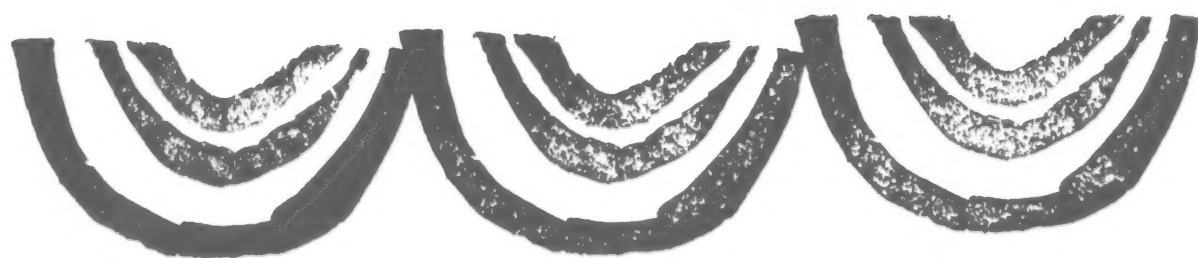
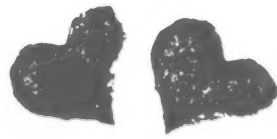
Food : yummy;

Always chomping,

Never full, always hungry;

Tapeworm ?

Philip Johnson



Wolves;

Wild canines

Playing, howling, hunting,

Taking care of young

Puppies.

Deer;

Always alert,

Leaping, listening, watching,

Grazing in among trees,

Eating.

Nina Stoyan



"Spooky in the night....."

- Hannah and Carol's Tuesday group

- Setting a Mood



"Spooky in the night....."

- Hannah and Carol's Tuesday group

Setting a Mood With the Group Process

Six children joined the Tuesday morning group today for the first time. There are now 15 children in this group, nine of whom have visited the room regularly (once a week) for four months. These new children wanted most of all to get a poetry book of their own to write in, and there was much excitement about choosing from among a pile of composition books covered with prints and gift wrap paper. Eager to write something in these books, they met together with me at a table while the other children moved away to do independent writing.

Before leaving, they were given copies of some of the poems read to them recently for their private collections. Each had a clear idea of how they would spend the session: pasting, re-writing, composing new poems, trying to write a haiku and a

cinquain using the same topic in both.
There were some invitations to team together to work on joint poems.

I asked the new children, "Do you believe that things you hear and see can change the way you feel sometimes?" Some no's, some yeses. A brief anecdote followed about watching TV the night before while doing a crossword puzzle and not really paying much attention to the screen, when suddenly I looked up to see what was happening. "What do you think made me look at the screen?" "The music got louder or spookier or faster; somebody screamed; maybe you suddenly didn't hear anything at all; a door slammed ..." - "I had been in a quiet mood and something had changed it." "Writers need to be able to find just the right words to fit certain moods. If you wanted to write to show someone that you feel sparkly and happy,

what kinds of words would come into your head?"

On large drawing paper in the center of the table, I recorded the responses:

laughing, shouting, yelling, wiggles, parties,

recess, "Hey, my man!", "Right on!", loud.

At the top of the page I printed the word EXCITED. "What did your hands and feet and faces and bodies do just now when we were thinking of words to set an excited mood?"

There was an immediate repeat of back-slapping, hand-shaking, giggling and a few impromptu dance steps.

On a second sheet of paper, I wrote the word WHISPERS. Let's see how quickly we can change the mood now with words. Tell me whatever comes into your head when you think of the word whispers: I recorded in list form -

"Quiet.

Sh-sh-sh-sh.

Spooky. (when?) Spooky in the night.

(Why?) ghosts. (What kind?) white

(What are they doing?) White ghosts howling low.

Whispering secrets.

(What kind of secrets?) Scary. Sad. Super secrets!

(What can you do with whispers?) no response

(What are whispers for?) talking softly. surprises.

sharing secrets, being happy with your best friend."

"Let's see what we've said, and if we've set a whispery mood." I re-read the list of words and phrases with no attempt to use a quiet voice. No one wanted to change anything.

G: "Let's make a poem, a very quiet poem, from what we've written. A poem is a song; the words sound beautiful together. A song is a poem; it sings a special message."

On large chart paper at the easel I printed the
title, Whispers.

G; "I like the way we began. Let's keep the first
two lines just as they are."

Whispers

Quiet, sh-sh-sh.
Spooky in the night.

White ghosts
howling low

The children are all
sharing the idea page.
I re-read the two lines
in a hushed voice several
times, waiting for them
to tell me what comes next.
My re-reading.
Some discussion initiated

Scary- sad- super-
secrets

by the kids about
leaving out the next
line, "whispering
secrets". They finally
agree and ask me to
write.

I re-read the lines
adding the last as if it
were all one fast word:
scarysadsupersecrets!
I love the sound of it
and ask the group to
"sing" it with me in a
whispery way. "The sound
is so special because
the words mean just the

right things, and all of
the words begin with the
same beautiful s sound.
They slide together and
make me almost feel a
whisper coming." The
children are excited now
and there are some minutes
spent on each saying aloud
the alliterative phrase.
There is much re-reading
of all four lines.
I ask if they think that's
a good place to end the
poem. They reject the
implication that the rest
of their idea page could

Whispers are for
talking softly

Whispers are for
surprises

And happy times
And sharing

be excluded from this
poem and ask me to write
the next line.

Lorenzo thinks we should
repeat the "whispers are
for" pattern to end the
poem. I test it out on
just their ears and the
decision is to say it
just one time more.

"Are we finished?"

There will be no omissions.

"Put down the rest of it."

They dictate:

More re-reading by me, by
some group members. I
ask them to choose a felt

pen to sign the poem.

There is some hesitancy

on the part of two girls

who want to know first

"Is it good?" before

they will write their

names. I refuse to judge,

asking them instead if

they like it. It is

their poem, not mine.

They check with each other

and decide, "Yeah. It

sounds pretty good."

I offer to type the poem

and duplicate it quickly

for them; those who want
to, copy it into their new
poetry books.

We gather together again at the end of the session. Every-
one, including the children who were independent writers
receive a copy of "Whispers".

Whispers

Quiet, sh-sh-sh.
Spooky in the night,
White ghosts howling low...
Scary-sad-super-secrets.
Whispers are for talking softly;
Whispers are for surprises
And happy times
And sharing.

Jennifer
Lorenzo
Cheryl
Jonathan
Kathy Cole
Grover

We hear it aloud and accept comments about it. Some children who were working on their own have new poems for me to read aloud to the group.

Of all the poems read to the children in which they were asked to feel the poet's mood, the one which influenced the children most was Gwendolyn Brooks' little book, Aloneness.*

I had prepared a blank book, untitled, for whatever poems the children might create after hearing the book. In the discussion that followed with a group of eight to ten year olds I suggested that we decide upon one particular mood to write about. Their decision would become the title of the new book and other children who come to the poetry room would add their thoughts to it. The first suggestion, predictably, was to entitle the book "Aloneness". One child objected that Gwendolyn Brooks had already written a book about that, so we could think of something different. I was eager to have this child's creative thoughts on aloneness

* see appendix

and quietly asked him to write the poem whenever he found the time. The group quickly rejected "happiness, sadness, tears (changed to grief by another child), and anger".

Annette suggested that we write about all of the things that make us feel quiet. There was general approval, perhaps because Annette is usually so quiet herself and rarely offers suggestions within a group setting. I asked Annette if the book should be called "Quietness", but she was undecided. Matthew thought it should be quieter than that and we settled on the word Silence. The Silence Book became the focal point of attention for all of the groups for about three weeks.

The selections which follow are from The Silence Book and demonstrate the children's use of mood setting techniques when writing without teacher guidance:

Silence is when blossoms open

And butterflies fly

The sun goes down

And you are alone.

Kathy B. (8)

I'm in a Ford LTD

Whizzing along the woods in
winter,

Riding a bike, freewheel
clicking softly-

Swimming underwater

In a museum or library,

Peace.

John K. (11)

A bull sits under a shady tree
Licking the green roses that grow
Straight up
In front of him.

Lorenze (11)

Inside my room
with the door closed,
there is silence.

Erika F. (7)

Tired green words
Lie on a sheet of paper,
Silently.

Sheldon (10)

Silence is elusive
Smooth and shining
Quiet and slippery.
Silence is an old green turtle,
Plodding along.
Silence is an oil painting,
An old, old painting.

Ross (12)

Pins drop,
Steps creak,
Clocks tick,
Dogs tip,
Cats yawn,
The house is silent.
Melissa, Lisa, Gigi (11)

Silence is Susan

When she's doing anything.

Mindy (12)

Nothing happening,

Twenty of or twenty after the hour,

Eating dinner,

Sleeping.

Silence is broken:

I have a headache.

Philip (12)

Night's darkness

brings silence

through my window.

Mindy (12)

Gathered in thought
Alone in my room,
Only the occasional sound of a bus.
A think whisp of smoke from the incense
on my desk,
A letter from my brother,
A book about life after death:
Silence.

Nicky (12)

Rain can be silent
When it's alone in the sky.
Raindrops hurry down the window panes
Without quarreling
And slide quietly along the cracks
Into the bricks.

Melissa and Lisa (11)

All the earth is sleeping;

You run in the fields

And two birds are peeping;

You're by yourself

And weeping.

Saranne (10)

Silently,

A hard, stiff, grasshopper

Collects food

In the thick green grass.

Cheryl (10)

Silence

I go

on a

trip

without

my brother

and sister.

Donna (9)

A tall white statue

Looks at everybody

In front of City Hall.

Tamara (9)

Pigeons sailing high

in noon-time skies...

Lorenzo (11)

A doll sits in the toy box

Waiting for you to pick her up.

Signed by Anonymous

(Hannah and Carol's Tuesday group)

On a breezeless summer night

All is quiet and still...

No dogs bark.

No cars run.

No street people whisper

in alleys or on the corners.

No sirens blare.

Only the sound of birds sleeping

Pierces this silence.

Kira (11)

Silence is in the house

Across my street.

The people are all gone.

The house is empty

And burned.

Desiree (9)

Silence

is

not

a

library

that has

three persons

in

a

seat.

James M. (9)

A fish swims in the bluish green water

Looking for friends, silently.

Kathy C. (9)

Silence Is

A star-filled night on a lonely field,
A suit of armour with a sword and shield,
A big cat creeping up after her prey
Her cubs at home in a silent play,
A gentle rain in the middle of April
Falling onto a great, tall maple.

Susan B. (10)

Inside the car at night

with the windows shut

Everything outside is silent.

Melissa S. (7)

Sleeping
makes
me
silent.

Pier S. (7)

The first time I watched Sunkist,

My golden fish,

It nibbled

Without a sound.

Julie B. (7)

Stars

read the

buildings

at night

without

saying

a

word.

Dreams are silent.

They make me so scared

I can't shout.

Vincent D. (8)

Melissa S.,
Erika F.,
Julie B. (7)

Silence

My fists are up

And I'm walking

in anger

All over my brain.

John S. (9)

John S. (9)

stack.

smoke

a

of

out

coming

smoke

is

Silence

122

Silence is everywhere;
It's in the fields
And on the ladybugs;
It hops with the grasshoppers
And strolls with the turtles;
It crawls with the earthworms,
And it's with me.

Sylvia (9)

Silence, silence, slipping by
Seas of silver in the sky...

Sylvia (9)

Quietness

I'm looking at rocks thinking

About a world of rocks

I am thinking of pages

turning,

and of the sound of

a soft melody

played by a folk

guitar and

abandoned houses.

Brendan (8)

124

Silence is in the wings
of a bluebird flapping home
Leading the day to an end,
Soft chipmunks collecting nuts
for the winter,
Farmers picking their crops for
a get-together feast of the
family,
The end of summer.

Heidi F. (8)



-Epilog

There is no proper ending for the reader, there is none for me. The quest and the pleasure continue with me as I intend for it to with the children. An additional invitation seems more appropriate here than a summation. The inferred invitation in the opening pages requested the pleasure of your attention as the children and I sought, in our particular ways, to breathe poetic life into a physical space called a writing room.

I have deliberately provided only glimpses of life in the room (in the hope that yours will reflect only you and your children). I am reluctant, however, to leave the most hoped-for conclusion to chance: the creative impulse and the frequency and quality of creative output are not self-sustaining. Neither occurs automatically and

consistently in all children. The children were excited by the writing sessions and found them to be happy times, but few sessions occurred without the question, "What are we going to do today?" Accurately interpreted, the question, asked with eager anticipation, meant 'what kind of poems will we hear?', 'what shall we play around with together?', 'what's on your mind, teacher?' Always, there was a germ of a plan, occasionally an almost complete internal flow-chart, or some 'hitching post' which everyone could use, reject, or tuck mentally away for other days and other times. These suggestions were take-off points for the children, not assignments. Sometimes we would attempt to innovate on an author's style, a technique suggested and encouraged by The Bill Martin Instant Readers.*

Idea-prompters were occasionally planned and tossed inside

* see appendix

grab-bags containing two words or a suggestive phrase.

Grabbing a card with the words 'tame/wild', Matthew (9)

wrote,

"The night is wild with booming
thunderstorms that uproot the
resting flowers.

The night is tame with soft winds
that tickle the pansy bed,
and me, too."

Kelli (9) swapped cards with friends until she received

"in/out/across/between". She wrote,

"Out across the desert,
Deep inside the forest,
Right between the sun's light
Sitting next to the flowers
There was a black crow!"

External stimuli were purposefully brought to bear on the
children for internalizing and translating into poetic
expression:

-What's happening to the clock?

"Molasses hands slide around my body".

(Tony B.)

-It's hot today. What things taste like summer?

"sour grass whistles and balloons
with a rubber perfume..."

(Susan B.)

The writing room has provided the setting for our poet-
children to use language to intimately reveal experiences,
real and imagined, with people, beauty, things, life. The
concluding invitation then, is to the reader, but for all
children. It is best offered by Robert Frost,

"You come, too".

Gloria Bush

Summer, 1974

Appendix

- p. 48 I Feel the Same Way,
Lillian Moore, Scholastic Books.
- p. 104 Aloneness, Gwendolyn Brooks,
The Broadside Press..
- p. 122 The Bill Martin Instant Readers,
Holt, Rhinehart, Winston. 1971.
- p. 87 Rubber stamps were made by the children and teacher
using ordinary Eberhard rubber erasers. The
carving was done with Exacto craft knives. A
kit with knives, ink, erasers, stamp pads and
helpful suggestions is available from The Workshop
for Learning Things, 55 Chapel Street, Newton,
Mass. 02160.

The following list in no way represents a suggested collection of poetry for children. There are omissions by chance, by unavailability, by selectivity, by lack of knowledge. The single purpose of this list is to provide an account of the books our children read most often and enjoyed best.

SCHOLASTIC PAPER EDITIONS:

Chicken Soup with Rice, Maurice Sendak

The Secret Place and Other Poems, Dorothy Aldis

When I am Alone, selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins

Don't Tell the Scarecrow and Other Japanese Poems, by Issa, Yayu, Kikaku et al.

Hi Diddle Diddle, by Mother Goose

Over in the Meadow, illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats

Black is Beautiful, by Ann McGovern

I Know an Old Lady, Rose Bonne

A Rocket in My Pocket, compiled by Carl Withers

Did You Ever See?, Walter Einsel

Don't Turn Your Back, Langston Hughes, with woodcuts by

Ann Grifalconi, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1969.

Cricket, a monthly periodical which includes original

poetry by children. Open Court Publishing Co.,

1058 Eighth St., LaSalle, Ill. 61301.

There is no rhyme for silver, Eve Merriam, Atheneum,

New York, 1966.

Jump-Rope Rhymes, Barbara McGee, The Viking Press, New

York, 1969.

There Comes A Time, Elisabeth Borchers, Doubleday, New York, 1965.

Cats and Bats and Things with Wings, Conrad Aiken, Atheneum, New York, 1966.

City Poems, Lois Lenski, Henry Z. Walck, Inc., New York, 1971.

On City Streets, selected by Nancy Larrick, M. Evans and Co., New York, 1968.

Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle and Other Modern Verse, compiled by Dunning, Lueders, and Smith, Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., New York, 1967.

The Panther and the Lash, Poems of our Times, Langston Hughes, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1967.

All That Sunlight, Charlotte Zolotow, Harper and Row, New York, 1967.

Listen, Rabbit, Aileen Fisher, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1969.

The World of Christopher Robin, A. A. Milne, E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1958.

Poems and Verses About the City, Donald J. Bissett, ed., Chandler Publishing Co., 124 Spear St., San Francisco, California 94105, 1968.

A Puffin Quartet of Poets, Eleanor Farejeon, James Reeves,
E. V. Rieu, and Ian Serrallier, Penguin Books, Inc.,
3300 Clipper Mill Rd., Baltimore, Md., 1965.

Cherry Blossoms (Japanese Haiku, Series III), translations
by Basho, Buson, Issa, Shiki, et al., The Peter Pauper
Press, Mount Vernon, New York, 1960.

A Beginning Book of Poems, selected by Marjorie Lawrence,
Addison-Wesley, Menlo Park, Calif., 1967.

Every Time I Climb a Tree, David McCord, Little, Brown
and Co., Boston, 1967.

In the Middle of the Trees, Karla Kuskin, Harper and Row,
New York, 1958.

Scholastic Record and Book Companion Series:

1 7-inch record and an accompanying paper backed
book, both in a study folder.

"Favorite Rhymes from A Rocket in My Pocket"

"Selections From The Arrow Book of Funny Poems"

"Folk Song Festival"

"Faces and Places: Poems for You"

"The Arrow Book of Poems"

"The Haunted House and Other Spooky Poems and Tales"

These have been most helpful to me:

Pass the Poetry Please, Lee Bennett Hopkins,
Scholastic Magazines, Inc., 1972.

Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing,
Perry and Bowen, Meredith Publishing Co., 1967.

How Does A Poem Mean?, John Ciardi, Houghton
Mifflin, 1959.

Sparkling Words, Ruth Kearney Carlson, Wagner
Publishing Co., 1968.

Children Write Poetry, A Creative Approach,
Flora J. Arnstein, Dover Publications, Inc.,
1967.

A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum,
Grades K-13, James Moffett, Houghton-Mifflin,
1973

In the Early World, Elwyn S. Richardson, Pantheon
Books, Random House, New York, 1964.

Let Them Be Themselves, Lee Bennett Hopkins,
Citation Press, New York, 1969.

Helping Children Accept Themselves and Others,
Helen L. Gillham, Bureau of Publications,
Teachers College, Columbia University, 1959.

Rose, Where did you get that red? Teaching Great
Poetry to Children, Kenneth Koch, Random
House, 1973.